

## A TALENT TO MEWS

Jonathan Reed's former London coach house exhibits his distinctive gifts as an interior designer. Ripping out partitions linked to its past life as a bordello, he has fashioned an airy, loft-like space from superbly crafted natural materials and classic modern furniture. Matt Gibberd reports. Photography: Simon Upton

The sitting room is furnished with reupholstered leather chairs by Bruno Mathsson, a 19th-century wing chair from Howe and a Madras oak chair. On an ottoman draped with an Anatolian goat-hair rug are cushions in a hand-printed 1930s fabric designed by Phyllis Barron for Clivedon College, Cambridge.





This page, clockwise from top left: in the kitchen, glass-and-stone stools by Alessi; Berger seated by a concrete worktop by Gammarelli; a chair in left oak by Richard La Zebbo; a wooden stool next to a 1940s Fritz Koenig arm sofa covered in hand-dyed linen, the two elm chairs are by Andrew Fisk, while the barbe partition was built by Plan English in timber and blackened steel. Opposite: a 1960s Italian wall light hangs over a table in elm and stained oak by Steven Gauger. The Windsor chair was made by Hans Wegner for his own use, and the oak bar cabinet is by Robert Thompson of Kilburn.





**WHEN THE** designer Jonathan Reed bought his mews house in central London, there were a few things that didn't add up. It had no living room to speak of, yet there was a Jacuzzi big enough for eight, a network of CCTV cameras and a glass-fronted vivarium for pampered pythons. An entire room contained only computer servers – when he rang the internet provider to take over the broadband, he was told that it would cost him '£800 per month, sir'. Polite enquiries were made with the neighbours, who confirmed Reed's suspicions: he had acquired the area's finest internet brothel.

'The house sees fewer nocturnal comings and goings under Reed's stewardship, although he and his partner, the fashion designer Graeme Black, entertain regularly. 'Our friends love it – even the die-hard Modernists,' says Reed. 'Carmen Busquets [one of Net-a-Porter's founding investors] says it makes her feel like she's in the country. It's because we've used so many natural materials – it's warm without being claustrophobic.'

On the top floor, it feels like an 18th-century Spitalfields silk-weaver has been set to work in a Meatpacking District loft, with Georgian sash windows, rough-sawn timber floors, concrete beams and a steeply pitched tongue-and-groove ceiling. A wonderfully uplifting place in which to spend time, it is configured as a single open-plan space arranged around a central chimney, and functions variously as a living room, a kitchen, a dining area or simply a place to curl up on a Frits Henningsen sofa and read a book.

Reed has furnished the space with some museum-quality furniture. 'There is a pair of 'Jetson' chairs by Bruno Mathsson that he reupholstered in new leather and canvas for a military look; an oak coffer dating back to 1490, originally from a church in Worcestershire and made from a single log; and Hans Wegner's take on a Windsor chair, which used to belong to the Danish designer himself.'

Reed previously lived in a loft in Chelsea, and, he explains: 'The concept of moving in to a mews house was not interesting.' 'The house had come up several times on his internet searches and he had dismissed it out of hand: 'Everything was in the wrong place, the windows were plastic, and the walls were painted in primary red and yellow.' It was only when he saw the plan of the house from above that he realised its potential – not on Google Earth, but from the window of a passenger jet. 'I was flying in to London on the aeroplane, and from above I could see that the building was a perfect square, with windows on all sides and a huge chimney stack running through the middle like a Lutyns gatehouse. I realised that it would be possible to take every wall out.'

Having banished the crude partitions, Reed set about dividing the space in a way that would retain a sense of transparency and maximise the natural light. He turned to his friend Katie Fontana, the creative director of Plain English, with whom he developed a modular timber-, steel-and-glass panelling system in the language of 'Northern factory floor meets nice stable'.

Top, to the right of a copper bath, is the desk where Jonathan Reed does much of his work. Behind it stands an early 20th-century cedar-and-cypress cabinet, possibly by Lutyns. A 1920s-tile mirror by Mitroli (top) stands on a modern Berber rug. Above, a Loman (top) lithograph hangs above a Jeton 'Y' wood-burning stove. The flames are made of Pyralite (lava stone), and the walls are covered in natural linen. Opposite, in the bathroom, Grayson Perry's *Map of Nowhere* hangs above an oak-and-leather bench by Gordon Russell. The glazed door has a linen pull-up blind.



A 2006 photograph by Chryssie Letas from her 'Blue Hour' series hangs above the suede bedhead. The hexagonal bedside tables are by Robert Lottner, and the steel reading lights are by Studio Reed. To the right is the dressing room, separated by another screen designed by Plain English and Jonathan Reed.







These beautifully detailed partitions have been used to create rooms within rooms, including a pantry beside the kitchen on the top floor, and a bijou cloakroom off the guest bedroom downstairs (which Reed refers to as 'the corner shop'). There's also one in the master bedroom, behind which is a delightfully decadent dressing room. It's lit up at night, so that the rows of meticulously arranged clothes glow expensively. 'It helps that neither of us are into fluorescents,' says Reed.

The building was originally a coach house, with two Yorkstone staircases ('The coachmen didn't hang out with the stable lads') and a shaft in the centre of the chimney that pulled the foul air out, much like modern stack ventilation. The top floor was built as a hayloft, with low ceiling height, so Reed dropped the level to make it more suitable as a living room. 'We wanted to reinstate the humble heritage and be sensitive to the original use of space,' he explains. 'We stripped the chimney back to the brickwork, for example, and in the entrance hall we've used end-grain oak flooring, which references the fact that the carts would have passed through here.'

Throughout the house the utmost care has been paid to craftsmanship and quality of materials. In the shower, for example, Reed has specified alluringly inky handmade tiles from Froyles that are graded in four different shades of indigo, from dark at the bottom to light at the top. Everything is bespoke, including the kitchen, which was originally built for Reed's house in Yorkshire but never installed because it burnt down. The only other thing he rescued from the fire was the English oak boarding on the ceiling above it, made by Ian Thompson Cartwright. The great-grandson of the turn-of-the-century furniture-maker Robert Thompson of Kilburn (known as 'The Mouseman'), Cartwright has continued the family business and still uses its signature carved mouse, which is believed to be the earliest three-dimensional trademark. One of these immutable rodents can be found lurking at the top of the banisters.

Jonathan Reed's impeccable taste has been applied to interiors for the likes of Elle Macpherson and Claudia Schiffer. If his latest client is anything to go by, they seem to trust him. 'She has a big bathroom, and we've put her desk in it,' he says chirpily. The whole bathroom-cum-office concept is inspired by his own house, where he can often be found beavering away beside the rolltop en déshabillé. 'Graeme is away in China a lot, and I like to have a warm, intimate space to work in.' In many ways the bathroom has been treated as the most important room in the house, with linen-covered walls, an elegant early 20th-century cabinet attributed to Edwin Lutyens, ceramics by Michael Cardew, and artworks by Lucian Freud and Grayson Perry. It's all a far cry from the house's bordello days. The Jacuzzi is long gone, usurped by a copper bathtub that gleams like a buffed-up Academy Award in the half-light ■

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Top: Like much of the other woodwork in the house, the banisters were made by Ian Thompson Cartwright, who continues his great-grandfather Robert 'Mouseman' Thompson's firm, and trademark mouse. Above: In the entrance hall, Reed has retained the original Yorkstone coach-house stairs, installing end-grain oak block flooring, tiles by Robin and hand-painted linings, wallpaper. Opposite: A 19th-century museum display of birds from Humphrey Carteco decorates the hall, along with a steel console from Stecki Reed, a ceramic sculpture by Paul Peplig and a bowl by Michael Cardew

